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ABSTRACT

This final evaluation of the 1991-92 program year of the Latin American literacy Project, designed to foster English language literacy in Spanish-speaking families in Canada, is intended as a formative report, American Literacy Project is intended as a formative report, assessing the changes in the students' language proficiency and the progress in the program's design. Standardized tests and questionnaires measured progress in language proficiency, and additional data were collected via observation and unstructured interviews. The following findings are reported: (1) the children's program is successful in its language and educational readiness goals, with the children showing progress in literacy skills and attitudinal changes; (2) the adult program, a combination of traditional and more modern methodologies for teaching English, is functioning at a satisfactory level with students exhibiting a degree of second language growth, but structural and content changes in syllabus design would be beneficial; and (3) the intergenerational component of the project is not being implemented to its fullest. Suggestions are offered for program enhancement. (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education) (LB)

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LATIN AMERICAN LITERACY

PARTNERSHIP PROJECT

FINAL FORMATIVE EVALUATION

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Preamble

This final evaluation for the 1991-92 programme year of the Latin American Literacy Project is intended to serve as a formative report, assessing the changes in the students' language proficiency and the progress in the programme's design. It's criteria are set in relative terms, using methods both of an *a priori* programme scrutiny and empirical comparison of language results before and after the program implementation. The means of measurement for the language proficiency were largely those of standardized tests and questionnaires. Some qualitative data were also collected in the form of observational notes and unstructured interviews. The nature and status of these findings are only intended as advisory.

2. *Childrens' Program*

2.1 Program Profile

The children's program continues to pursue language enrichment, bilingualism and emergent literacy as its primary educational goals. Within the general structure of the program and its daily activities, there is clear evidence of both productive and receptive language enrichment. First language development is given a priority status. Conceptual, interactional and textual development are initiated in Spanish. The resulting educational knowledge, social routines and emergent literacy skills are then transferred or assumed transferable into another language. Bilingualism in this model is proportional, seeking to ensure maintenance and maximize transfer of linguistic and cognitive skills. Engagement in an emergent awareness of literacy forms the focus of most of the instructional activities. Children take part in collaborative painting, acting, story telling, retelling and bookmaking activities at different levels of literacy complexity. These range from initial literacy engagements such as identifying, labelling and commenting on individual items, through to the more conceptually complex creation and verbatim-like story retelling of their own and other story books.

Decisions about the optimum time to introduce emergent literacy activities is assessed in terms of readiness and interest and the calendar date fluctuates from year to year according to the language readiness of the children in the program. Presently, the progression of activities is based on an extended model of Sulzby's (1986) classification scheme for emergent story reading development. It is this engagement in productive and receptive emergent literacy activities that is

hypothesized to be the major contributing factor in the remarkable language growth recorded for both Spanish and English.

2.2 Spanish Language Testing

Of the twenty five children registered at one time or another in this program, there are complete pre, mid and post test results available for only ten of them. Eleven children were withdrawn from the program for a variety of reasons, normally associated with changes in their parents participation. Incomplete results are available for three other children who entered the program in the second term. Generally, their growth is similar to that of the ten children reported here.

The results of the testing are presented in Table I. The Table contains information about the Spanish and English Language Age of each child, as measured on the *One Word Expressive Vocabulary Test*. The test assumes a relationship between vocabulary development and general language development. Childrens' scores are normed against the performances of thousands first language speakers of similar age. The **Real Age** of the child then acts as a point of reference in measuring their comparative performance. A **Language Age** is calculated by referencing their performance to a similar performance in the first language population and noting the **Real Age** of this sample group.

In Table I, the first column identifies each child and the three tests. Column two lists the childrens' ages in years and months (e.g. 3.11 = 3 yrs & 11 mths) at the time of testing. The third column provides the relative measure of langauge age as calculated from the test results. The fourth column indicated the difference between the real age and the Spanish language age for each test. The fifth column shows the sum of language growth in years and months from the first actual scoring of the test. The sixth column lists the Language Age scores for the English version of the test. The seventh column provides the difference between real age and the English language age. And the last column shows the English language gain in years and months.

There are limitations to this language achievement test. As an instrument based solely on vocabulary is an incomplete one. However, it has several redeeming features for the purpose of this program. The test is one of three used by the Calgary Board of Education in their ESL assessment and placement process for grade one students. Of the three tests (all of which were piloted last year) this test is the simplest to administer and complete. Given the age of the children, this is an important criteria. Furthermore, the content validity of the test is high in the eyes of the program staff. They have judged it to be an accurate measure of the

vocabulary development of the children across both languages, providing one readiness indicator for literacy activities. Since the test does not investigate syntactic accuracy or complexity, nor does it measure interactional development, it is not a measure of bilingualism per se. But it does reflect the degree of similarity in the vocabulary development of in first and second language with first language age peers.

Efforts were made to minimize extraneous effects. The test was offered by the staff to minimize disruption and to provide a relaxed atmosphere for the children. The staff members administered the test in their dominant language so that the children were presented the test by a mother tongue speaker of the language being tested. Those children who were not interested in engaging in a picture labelling activity were asked again at a later date. Children who were unable or uninterested in engaging in the test are marked by a dash (-). Those who readily took the test but were unable to achieve enough correct answers to be assigned a standard score are marked by a No Score (NS).

In interpreting the results, and hence evaluating the merits of the emergent literacy approach, it is important to note that the children beginning the program registered uniformly low Spanish Language Age scores. While it might be argued that the testing process was an alien one to the children and that their ability was actually higher than the test would suggest, it is worth noting the trend towards lower Language age Scores persists through the second testing period. It is only by the end of the program that Spanish Language Age scores demonstrate exponential growth. The low Spanish Language Age scores support the teachers comments that the childrens' oral abilities did not indicate a readiness for emergent literacy activities, at the onset of the program. The introduction of emergent literacy activities had to be adjusted to the language awareness of the children. During the second term, the emergent literacy activities became a central focus. The is also the period in which we see the greatest Spanish Language Age growth. On average, children gained about 2 years and 7 months of Spanish Language Age during the seven months of the program, with 23 months of Spanish Language Age growth in the last four months of the year. This represents a 35% increase in the language growth reported in last year's children for the same time period; a sure sign of the vitality of the program.

2.3 English Language Testing

English language is proportionally increased as a medium for communication and interaction as the year progresses. Again, because the Spanish Language Age scores tended to be low, and given the program's commitment to first language development as essential in effective bilingualism, the proportional introduction

of English was adjusted to fit the readiness of the students. It is evident in the final test results that this proved a wise decision. The average English Language Age growth for the children was 2 years and 8 months during the 7 months of the program.

Table I
Consolidated Statistics: Gardner Test

CHILD	REAL AGE	SPANISH LANGUAGE AGE	SPANISH ±	SPANISH GAIN	ENGLISH LANGUAG E AGE	ENGLISH ±	ENGLISH GAIN
A PRE	4.5	2.4	-2.1	3.7 yrs.	2.4	-2.1	3.4 yrs.
MID	4.9	3.8	-1.1		3.3	-1.6	
POST	5.2	5.11	+ .9		5.8	+ .6	
B PRE	3.4	N/S	N/S	3.2 yrs.	N/S	N/S	3.0 yrs.
MID	3.8	2.4	-1.4		1.8	-2.0	
POST	4.2	3.2	-1.0		3.0	-1.2	
C PRE	-	-	-	2.3 yrs.	-	-	2.2 yrs.
MID	3.7	2.5	-1.2		N/S	N/S	
POST	3.11	4.8	+ .9		2.2	-1.9	
D PRE	3.5	1.10	-1.7	2.7 yrs.	N/S	N/S	2.1 yrs.
MID	3.8	2.1	-1.7		1.5	-2.3	
POST	4.1	4.5	+ .4		2.1	-2.0	
E PRE	-	-	-	2.8 yrs.	-	-	4.4 yrs.
MID	5.9	2.11	-2.10		N/S	N/S	
POST	6.1	5.7	- .6		4.4	-1.9	
F PRE	4.6	3.6	-1.0	.8 yrs.	1.3	-3.3	1.10 yrs.
MID	4.10	3.10	-1.0		1.1	-3.9	
POST	5.3	4.2	-1.1		3.1	-2.2	
G PRE	-	-	-	3.7 yrs.	-	-	1.2 yrs.
MID	3.9	2.1	-1.8		1.3	-2.6	
POST	4.1	5.8	+1.9		2.5	-1.8	
H PRE	4.6	3.4	-1.2	2.9 yrs.	N/S	N/S	1.4 yrs.
MID	4.10	3.9	-1.1		1.3	-3.7	
POST	5.3	4.7	- .8		1.4	-3.11	
I PRE	4.8				1.9	-2.11	3.8 yrs.
MID	4.11				3.3	-1.8	
POST	5.4	6.4	+1.0		5.5	+ .1	
J PRE	3.4				N/S	N/S	4.4 yrs.
MID	3.7				1.2	-2.5	
POST	4.1	6.4	+2.3		4.4	+ .3	

2.4 Summary Remarks

There is no question that the program is successful in its language and educational readiness goals. The children show remarkable progress across the year and informal conversations with some of the present classroom teachers of the children from last year's program indicate that the success is being transferred to their Division I education. It seems reasonable to hypothesize that the focus on emergent literacy is a strong contributing factor to the language growth. Children exhibited a significant development in their productive and receptive emergent literacy skills. They also showed a marked attitudinal change towards self-initiated engagements in literacy activities, either individually or in groups. Picture and print awareness, book-handling skills, reading voice developments, macro level listening skills, verbatim retellings and multiple event story grammars were all evidenced to varying degrees.

3. *Adult Program*

3.1 Program profile

The adult program is a combination of traditional and more modern methodologies for the teaching of English. It tends to teach grammar in a direct style, using Spanish as a medium for facilitating the explanation of grammatical rules in English. One of it's great strengths is that the students have a degree of cultural homogeneity. This permits first language clarifications and peer tutoring. The students are low beginners with a broad range of educational backgrounds. Their stated motivations for enroling in the program are to become functionally fluent and literate for the purpose of employment, and to increase educational success for their children. The combined program is one of the factors that promotes high attendance levels in the adult language learning program. Other factors include: first language explanations and a degree of comfort derived from the language and cultural homogeneity of the classroom. The students, though all at a beginner level, have a diverse range of educational backgrounds and first language literacy.

3.2 English Language Proficiency

The language proficiency of the adults was evaluated using two standard measures: English Language Skills Assessment (ELSA) and STEL. They provide

a measure of receptive grammatical competence through the evaluation of syntactic error identification in a modified cloze test format. They do not offer any information about discourse, strategic, or sociolinguistic competencies that contribute to the realization of communicative competence. nonetheless, they do indicate syntactic progress in relation to receptive comprehension. Results from these tests are not included in this report. They are available in raw score form in the companion report produced internally by th Latin American Literacy Project. In summary, the results indicate a percentage score across three levels of testing that translates to a general advancement from pre-beginner levels to low intermediate levels of competence for the average student in the program.

3.3 Student Questionnaires

Two different questionnaires were administered to the adult students. The purpose of the first questionnaire was to provide a student evaluation of the program and their progress. It combined a response on a six point Likert scale with a space for written elaboration. The second questionnaire was designed to provide some insight into the kind and degree to which literacy activities were part of home life. The results would tend to indicate that the adults were very satisfied with the quality of the program and their English language achievement, and that literacy does have a place in the daily/weekly activities of the home.

The student satisfaction with the program requires some interpretation. In keeping with research findings on cultural differences in the use of Likert scales, the adults in this program consistently used only the extremes points on the scale, avoiding convergence in the middle values. The additional comments space allotted for each question was useful in assessing the basis of the Likert scale decision. In brief, all students were convinced of the efficacy of Spanish language explanation, all students were pleased with the breadth of activities for language learning that were afforded them in this program. All students were convinced of the importance of the children's program to the educational success of their children. Parents were less effusive about increasing their level of participation in the childrens' program, arguing that it reduced their own time for language study.

Suggested changes to the program focused largely on extending the teaching hours to full days and creating two separate classes to reflect the different levels of ability, each with its own teacher. Other suggestions included integrating more information about inexpensive family activities in Calgary into the language learning.

The second questionnaire focused on the home literacy environment. Its major premise is that the texture of home literacy involvements relates directly to the emergent literacy development of the child. Home literacy is affected mostly by the quality and quantity of literacy interactions in the family whether intergenerational or not. The questionnaire focused on the identification of instances and accoutrements of literacy-based activities, the profile of extended family/child interactions and language use, and the residential mobility of the family during the child's life.

From the results it is clear that the families involved in this program have some place for literacy in their lives, as evidenced by their family interactions. All report having a variety of adult and childrens' books, as well as magazines and newspapers at home. Some use the library services. About half the adults engage with their children in reading books nearly everyday The other half do so about once a week. Fewer parents engage in the productive literacy activities like drawing or story telling on a regular basis. Quantitatively speaking, the literacy environment of the majority of homes is of an acceptable level, however the quality of the interaction and its duration remain unclear. A pre-program survey of the literacy engagements was not taken, so it is not possible to assess the degree to which program involvement has fostered intergenerational literacy.

3.4 Writing Samples

Writing samples were evaluated using the ACTFL guidelines for the assessment of writing. While the guidelines are qualitative and holistic in nature, they permit assessment of topical, grammatical, lexical, organizational and mechanical aspects of writing along a proficiency scale. Generally speaking, the average writing progress for the adult students has been from a low beginner level to low intermediate, based on the ACTFL assessment scale. There are some students who performed less ably on the written evaluation because of a low first language literacy ability, which directly affects their second language literacy skills.

3.5 Summary Remarks

The adult program is functioning at a satisfactory level. It has the support of the students, exhibit a degree of second language growth. The program's present focus in its syllabus design might benefit from modifications to the language objectives to include a balance of functional, structural, language strand, micro skills, and strategic items. Some adjustment to the content in the direction of authenticity would go well with a language and content philosophy. In the final analysis, the adult program is meeting the needs of the students, but the language gain could be improved through refinements to the syllabus design.

4. *Intergenerational Component*

4.1 Defining the Goals

The intergenerational component was initially conceived of as a means of relating the developing second language literacy of the adults to the emerging literacy of the children. It was aimed at providing a motivation to adults to go beyond the cognitive limitations of functional literacy through the productive and receptive sharing of stories and daily events with their children. It was designed to address the recognized relation between low family literacy interactions and low educational assessment upon entering the school system. Hence, it combines an at risk program for children with an at risk program for adults, drawing support from each.

Presently, this perspective is not being implemented to its fullest. There are several good reasons for its de-emphasis in the program structure over the last year. The adult curriculum and subsequent syllabus does not use the content of topics related to the intergenerational goals in its classroom delivery. This places intergenerational concerns in a peripheral role. The adult students perceive their involvement with the children as interfering with their language learning. The reduction of course hours so that classes finished before lunch has reduced both the available time and the familial ambience of previous years, where parents and children ate lunch together, children napped and parents had time to engage in the spirit of intergenerational education. These aspects have been lost primarily as a result of funding cuts. The present financial austerity will continue to dictate constraints to an enriched program. It is necessary to reconsider the objectives of the intergenerational literacy component and reconfigure the delivery of those objectives in the most efficacious manner possible.

4.2 Future Considerations

My suggestion for future refinements of the intergenerational component is to embed the aims objectives of this component into the language learning component by using relevant tasks an activities as the authentic language experience echelon of within the communicative language teaching framework. This would permit the practice of discrete and global skills within the language strands (speaking, listening, reading, writing) as well as offering the content for language learning and the context for developing communicative competence.

5. *Concluding Remarks*

This program fills a direct need in language education. It blends first second and emergent language literacy with ESL and first language maintenance through a bilingual program delivery to two generations. Both generations are in an *at risk* category. The children benefit from the *head start* that they receive in educational routines and emergent literacy; and their language seems to be accelerated in the process. The adults gain access to bilingual instruction to help them initiate the language learning process. They also avoid the classic barriers to participation which tend to lead to withdrawal from adult language programs, partly because of the method of instruction, the cultural homogeneity and the childrens' program. It provides a blend of employment focused language development and English for general purposes.

From my observations and evaluations, I am willing to advance the following suggestions for program enhancement.

1. Maintain the bilingual teaching element of the adult program. It is a major incentive to the students.

2. Continue to move towards the integration of language learning goals and the intergenerational goals for their motivational and preventative characteristics, by seeking to include them into the content of the adult syllabus.

3. Aim to refine the balance of adult language syllabus by more explicitly addressing a wider range of elements that research has identified as contributing to communicative competence in language use.

4. Begin to keep a monthly portfolio of student work for each individual as a means of holistically assessing the language achievement across the spectrum of reading writing listening and speaking micro skills.

5. Revise the home literacy questionnaire and translate it into Spanish so that it can be offered to applicants and form part of their profile in the selection process.

6. Specify professional development time and allot a budget for your teachers so that the can attend local ATESL workshops and relevant conferences held in the area and network with other agencies.

7. Continue to promote research interests in your project and present findings at appropriate symposia.

The Latin American Literacy Project continues to make innovative advances in the area of Intergenerational Literacy. It is solidly managed and has a remarkably energetic and talented staff. It continues to internally monitor its own progress and produce in house reports documenting its findings. It has a high attendance and participation rate, which separates it from many entry level language and literacy programs. It successfully integrates two *at risk* populations to increase their inclusion education and work forces. And most importantly, it has the whole hearted support of the community it serves. All of these facts offer potential funders a program that worthy of their attention.

External Evaluator July 10, 1992

David L. E. Watt, PhD.